

## WOMEN CONTESTATION IN CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*

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### Abstract

This study aims at describing the depiction of four women in Creole community which is applied as the contestation in "*The Awakening*" and describing the reasons of Creole women's character contestation which related to particular purpose in that time. The writer uses the descriptive qualitative method as research design. The data is collected by using documentation. The data sources in this research are divided into two parts, primary and secondary. The primary data is novel of *The Awakening*. The secondary data is taken from the history of Creole society in Louisiana, journals, and the other sources from the website as the information. The base of this research is focused on Pierre Bourdieu's concept. This concept is used to discover the problem formulation through the sociological view which influences the way of thinking from four Creole women. The result of this research are a) the depiction of three women reveal that women can support economic as businesswomen and even artist. Meanwhile, the other one is submissive and worship to husband due to keep the balance in the household. b) the reasons of three women reveal that the men's authority is not important due to their basic background that support their economic through their proficiency as their manifestation to exist in the society. Meanwhile, the other one relies on the man to support her economic and a man as symbolic power. Based on the finding, the distinctive ideology as genetic structuralism which is connected to economic, politic and social background influence their way of thinking to get the opportunity.

*Keywords : Women, Contestation, Creole, Culture, Louisiana, Bourdieu.*

### INTRODUCTION

Novel as virtual object of subconscious dream and the mediatory of feeling which is connected in social reality. Novel gives the inspiration, the motivation and covers the mysterious events in the author's past background. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is published in 1899, as the unceasing topic to be discussed by researchers until this decade and the one of novel which involves Creole culture. Creole Community as the one of hybridization culture between French descendant and Spanish which are settled in Louisiana due to the politic polemic.

The role of a Creole woman in the past is limited by the custom of its era. The Creole women of nineteenth century subjugated their whole life to be a good wife who took care their family and marital life in their home (McMillan, 2000: 44). Kate Chopin portrays four Creole women who have distinctive role in determining their live for her own novel. The

distinctive behavior of four Creole women in *The Awakening* trigger many scholars argue it as feminism symbol in which contrast to its era in women role of nineteenth century.

From this objection, the writer has a purpose to explore the culture of Creole women who have distinctive perception in maintaining their live. This research is used to find out the secret reason as the mainstream to have distinctive life style. Those female characters will be studied in the way how they live and the main factors which trigger their perceptions.

## **METHOD**

A design of this research is focused through arrangement of relevance data collection (Kothari, 2004: 31). The data contains the sentences, texts, all the documents that can be read and has interrelation as the information sources. The researcher uses the descriptive qualitative method in studying phenomena that can be interpreted as the last result (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3-4). The data sources can be divided into two parts, primary and secondary. The primary data as original data for the first time that can be analyzed (Khotari, 2004: 95). Hence, for this research, the primary data is taken from Kate Chopin's E-book novel of *The Awakening*. Next, the secondary data is, a data that has been already collected from websites and other sources of crucial information about Kate Chopin, Creole culture, French colonization and other journals to be the consideration materials in supporting this research (Khotari, 2004: 95).

The data is collected by using documentation. It means that the source of documentary method is using the texts (Payne & Payne, 2004: 61). The text could be the mediator access easily to read the situation what happened in the past. From the appropriate data documentation will be organized and interpreted by using Pierre Bourdieu's concept.

Pierre Bourdieu create his theoretical orientation as the dualism perception through absurd opposition between objectivism and subjectivism ( Bourdieu, P 1990: 25-26). This dualism emphasizes the position of human as the subject and also object within the society. In other side as Pierre Bourdie's opposition, the subjectivism emphasizes the actor or human's actions and efforts as the point of analysis. Pierre Bourdieu's concept include Habitus, Capital, Field, and Symbolic Violence as the main contribution to understand the rule which is prevailing in the social views.

### **A. Habitus**

Habitus concern the outside background or the environment pressure as the crucial influences within the human's mind, hence it will influence the human's behavior.

*The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes... ( Bourdieu, P. 1984: 170-172)*

The Habitus is formed by social environment that link the distinctive principle within the human's mind. The habitus of person plays its own role depend on around the social life condition. Each person has different position to establish the intrinsic properties as the part of individual manner. Habitus is obtained as a result of the length of the position occupied in social life. Habitus has different effects for every person depending on the form of a person's position in social life; not everyone has the same habit; people who occupied the same position in social life, tend to have the same habits.

### **B. Field**

The field is the final station of Actor to practice their capitals as the manifestation, survive , influence, and determine their important role position in the social.

*A field, in Bourdieu's sense, is a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them... ( Bourdieu in Jenkins, 1992: 52 )*

This competition is used to fight the social existences by presenting the capital variety power relation as their manifestation. Actor who have the particular capital can dominate within the particular field based on their capital proficiency.

### **C. Capital (Modal )**

Capital as the identification to gain the power in the social competition. Capital can be divided into four categories. The first, economic capital can be seen of the wealth quantity (Bourdieu in Grenfell, 2008: 78). The second, cultural capital is formed by the individual abilities or proficiency in which include the knowledge, skills, the role play to make a relationship in the society, and etc that determine the positions in the social (Bourdieu in Grenfell, 2008: 78). The third, social capital could be built as invisible network of the social relationships (Bourdieu in Grenfell, 2008: 78). The last, symbolic capital could be materialized as the result of economic system and financial supporting (Bourdieu in Grenfell, 2008: 78).

From the concept of Pierre Bourdieu above that can be visualized in a domain social pattern :  $\text{Habitus} \times \text{Capital (Economic, cultural, social, symbolic)} + \text{Field} = \text{practice}$  (

Krisdianto, 2004: 198 ). In short description by establishing habitus in Actor's mind concept which is equipped the proper capital as complement motivation and supporting to be practiced into the proper field can consummate an effort to compete in the social space.

#### **D. Symbolic Violence**

Symbolic Violence as the impact of a symbolic power. Symbolic Violence is not a embodiment of victim physically but in the meaning of language transportation. It related to the things that can be legitimated consciously even though those are wrong statements. The use of symbolic power practice can establish the truth as legitimate in which ingrained within their mind is one of suppression form consciously.

*Symbolic violence is the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations which permit that imposition to be successful.*  
( Bourdieu in Jenkins, 1962: 66 )

The power symbol can reinforce, consummate the symbolic violence, establish the norm as the embodiment legitimacy which generate correct responses within the society. The norm, tradition within the society as the effect of symbolic violence which is launched by the dominant classes to take the benefit maximum such as discrimination as their superior domain practice.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the previous section has been described that contestation is related to the distinctive perspective as the unique of four Creole women's life style. Based on the contrast behavior and different activities of women seem as the rebellion to their women role of nineteenth century that should be but actually there is the main purpose and another factors that reinforce them to have different life style. In this part, the writer discusses the depiction of four Creole women in Kate Chopin's novel, "*The Awakening*" and the background of being different life style will be discussed for further based on Bourdieu's concept.

#### **Edna Pontellier sets her ideology as a wife.**

The depiction of Edna Pontellier is in her complexity behavior. A mother's responsibility is an uneasy thing to be done for Edna . A wife who always obey all the command for a husband is manacle in Edna's mind also. She has the ambition to reach what she like for getting the happiness without any consideration that will happen as the good influence or even the bad risk.

*In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. ( Chopin, IV ; 7 )*

The statement of “*They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels*” reveals the description of Creole women which is identified as a real mother who can marginalize the egoistical for her affection toward her family, who can give the comfortable life for their children, who can take care for their children , and who can serve their husband well. Edna is not a mother woman means that Edna is not appropriate in the position of being a mother. She is not ready to be a mother yet. She still always thinks about herself.

This is the short description of Edna’s portrayal in *The Awakening*. The researcher uses Edna’s habitual to link the information about her detail background in which trigger her to have distinctive perception. Habitus is formed by social world intervention around the human which will influence the human’s perspective.

Edna’s childhood experience influences into her thinking style and behavior. She lost her mother when she was a child which affected her matronly trait. Even though Margaret, her older sister replaced a position as a mother in her family, it does not give the big influences into Edna’s behavior.

*...She and her younger sister, Janet, had quarreled a good deal through force of unfortunate habit. Her older sister, Margaret, was matronly and dignified, probably from having assumed matronly and housewifely responsibilities too early in life, their mother having died when they were quite young, Margaret was not effusive; she was practical. Edna had had an occasional girl friend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type—the self-contained...Her most intimate friend at school had been one of rather exceptional intellectual gifts, who wrote fine-sounding essays, which Edna admired and strove to imitate; and with her she talked and glowed over the English classics, and sometimes held religious and political controversies. ( Chopin, VII ; 14-15 )*

Margaret’s thinking style does not reveal and same as a real mother. Edna Pontellier and also Janet have been left by their mother when they were quite young means they have not been felt the real affection from their mother before. From this reason, it triggers Margaret have a responsible to take care her sisters even though this situation is too early for her. The statement of “*Margaret was practical*” reveals when she was in position as a mother for their

sisters, she gave the freedom for their sisters. Hence, this situation formed Edna's character into the freedom behavior. When Edna was a child, she learned as intellectual one with their close friends in her school. Her intellectual habit with their close friends influenced her mind set, hence she learned to be young activist in her school.

From the description above, the habitus of social life background had set the figure of Edna to be an individual who has distinctive perception in her mind concept. The freedom from environment for speaking, choosing, and acting as Edna's habitus throughout her personal life before she decides to be married.

*... "I was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question. On the contrary, during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve and until—why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it—just driven along by habit. ( Chopin, VII ; 14 )*

This is the description of Edna's behavior which trigger the reason. How Edna's habitus when she was a teenager was reflected into her behavior when she took a position as a mother in her marriage. This is contrast within some scholars who argued that the portrayal of Edna Pontellier as the feminism prototype because there is no movement that influences Edna's behavior. Edna grew up in the city, Kentucky when the ideology had become the interesting topic within the education world. This is the reason of "Edna's habitus" brought herself controversy to adapt in the new situation when she moved to Louisiana.

*... Edna sent the quadroon away to her supper and told her she need not return. Then she sat and told the children a story. Instead of soothing it excited them, and added to their wakefulness. She left them in heated argument, speculating about the conclusion of the tale which their mother promised to finish the following night. ( Chopin, XV ; 37 )*

The description gives the clarity that Edna Pontellier does not leave her responsibility as a mother. Edna knows well about how to send her children go to sleep by telling the attractive story to them. Edna Pontellier is only lack of her motherhood because she needs the space to adapt the new situation of being a mother and a wife.

*She cares about her children, husband and her friends, and her new-found need for freedom creates conflicting emotions within her. ( Kampenberg, 2006: 12 )*

In conclusion, the portrayal of Edna Pontellier shows that a mother's responsibility is an uneasy thing to be done. Her habit to be freedom and intellectual idea as her cultural capital of former country are reflected in her behavior. It causes the controversy in her mind

in adapting the distinctive social background and stimulates Edna's mind to express the objections toward her husband's dictation.

#### **Adelle Ratignolle's obedience as a married woman.**

The portrayal of Adelle is to keep her responsibility as a mother and wife. It can be seen in the portrayal of Adelle, she is loyal toward her husband and adores her children.

*... If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adele Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. ( Chopin, IV ; 7 )*

The statement of "*The old ones*" reveals something that contrast to the new things. It seems that Adelle Ratignolle is the one who still respects the old-fashioned way of thinking. The statement of "*fair lady*" reveals the goodness behavior. From the utterance above, Adelle Ratignolle thought that bad behavior will bring misfortune and get the punishment. She is a woman who respects and trust to the myth and the sin every time she does a mistake.

From the description above, Adelle Ratignolle as a woman who spends her entire life to be a domestic woman. A wife who does her duties as a woman limitation and become submissive to her husband in order to keep on balance in the household life. Desire of having many children without worrying of losing her attention toward them as matronly side is Adelle Ratignolle's trait.

The background of different social life as the habitus, creates the ingrained culture in Adelle Ratignolle's trait. Adelle Ratignolle is a Creole woman who lives in Louisiana where the patriarchy system is bound and the limitation of the women role in the society.

Adelle Ratignolle's mind set is reflected in her behavior that family is everything for her.

*That lady seemed at a loss to make a selection, but finally settled upon a stick of nougat, wondering if it were not too rich; whether it could possibly hurt her. Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one. She was always talking about her "condition." Her "condition" was in no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation. ( Chopin, V ; 8 )*

From the utterance, Adelle Ratignolle is really a true mother. Having many children can support her life. It can be seen and understood that many children can create much of money and wealth which can support her unpredictable condition in the future.

*There are nine children in the Lebourgeois family; eight in that of M. d'Estrehen. Ten or twelve is not uncommon, and eighteen to twenty astonished no one. Second and third marriages are also very common. Yet, what a vast wilderness still remains to be populated. ( Morlas, 2003: 17 )*

The description above, supports Napoleon's reign in colonial era. A Creole woman is used to be a baby booster in order to enlarge population in Louisiana. The women in colonial Louisiana are expected to produce as many as children who will provide the wealth through labor. Hence, this is as Creole society culture which is inherited from French descendant colonial.

The Ursuline education in Louisiana as influx Catholicism gives the opportunity for Creole women where the gap of education between men and women is raised. The limited education and religious pillar influences Adelle Ratignolle becomes submissive wife with a man as the symbolic of power who can control anything. The gap of practical education system does not give the benefit opportunities for women than men in Louisiana.

*... If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adele Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. ( Chopin, IV ; 7 )*

The society makes the rule by marginalizing the women status. The social creates the symbolic power by providing the polite language and alibi as the legitimacy toward all of women , "True women always in the house, worship to husband." From this culture, the researcher sees the discrimination toward the Adelle Ratignolle which is reflected of women condition in the reality.

*The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. ( Chopin, IV; 7 )*

This is in contrast to some scholars who assume that Adelle Ratignolle as the figure of true women in nineteenth century in Louisiana. The society marginalize the position of women as the middle class. This habitus as the culture which is ingrained in women's mind set discloses that a woman is only dealing with household actively. A man like a God , so woman has to worship him as the head of household. Hence, the use of symbolic violence seems legitimated in women's mind with the alibi as their fate, as the middle class position creature than men. In the society, it will happen all the time.



In conclusion, the reason of Adelle Ratignolle is influenced from her limitation as a woman. Adelle Ratignolle as a woman who grew in the marginalized society as her culture which is ingrained in her mind set. She believes that a woman is under the power of man. A man is symbolic power in her perception. It simulates her behavior to be submissive woman toward her husband without objection at all.

In conclusion the portrayal of Adelle Ratignolle shows that she spends her entire life to be a domestic woman, and worship her husband as the comfortable position but actually from this habit trigger the symbolic violence due to the oppression which is legitimated. From this description, all of them related to the authority of men's impact. It can be seen that the tight habitus which the authority of the men is usual as her culture. The history of Creole society reveals that the marriage system in this society is intervention of political background and monopoly system ( Morlas, 2003: 36-37 ). . This habitus bound and ingrained in Adelle Ratignolle' submissiveness due to the authority of a man as the symbolic power.

#### **Madam Lebrun as extraordinary woman**

Madam Lebrun is a widow who has her own principle as single parent. She is a business woman who has a resort near the gulf as her main business. Madam Lebrun's life style is distinctive than her social life within Creoles.

*Madame Lebrun was bustling in and out, giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions in an equally high voice to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside ... ( Chopin, I ; 2 )*

From the description above, the proficiency to be a leadership and also the owner of a luxury resort can be found in Madam Lebrun's ability. It has been described clearly in the story or the utterance above, that Madam Lebrun is an extraordinary woman. She has the emphatic personality which trigger her become a leader. It can be seen about how she gave an order without doubt to her workers in order to help her in managing her resort business.

Madam Lebrun is a woman who will struggle for everything for her life and her sons. The reason which is applied in the utterance below :

*He was spending his summer vacation, as he always did, with his mother at Grand Isle. In former times, before Robert could remember, "the house" had been a summer luxury of the Lebruns. Now, flanked by its dozen or more cottages, which were always filled with exclusive visitors from the "Quartier Francais," it enabled Madame Lebrun to maintain the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright. ( Chopin, II ; 3- 4 )*

From the utterance above, Madam Lebrun is a woman who has the land heir from her parents. The utterance of *"In former times, before Robert could remember, "the house" had been a summer luxury of the Lebruns. Now, flanked by its dozen or more cottages"* , it gives the clarity information that Madam Lebrun is success and proficient in developing her business. Hence, Madam Lebrun's mind will affect her behavior as a leader who can control her business as her habitual situation. It is useful ability for supporting her financial condition without rely on a man. The habitus creates the culture as her skill and capability to hold the authority role.

The second reason which trigger Madam Lebrun struggle her life and her children is the condition or situation of being separated from her husband.

*"If your father had only lived!" Clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! It was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life. ( Chopin, VIII ; 18 )*

From the description above, this tragic condition triggers Madam Lebrun to be a leader for her business due to there is no role of a man in her family. This habitus emphasizes her mind concept and behavior as a woman who can control the business as well as a man.

In conclusion, the portrayal of Madam Lebrun shows that she is a business widow. Her proficiency to be a leader is appropriate for her in order to develop her business well. The reason of Madam Lebrun of becoming an independent woman is influenced from her habitus , financial capital and the symbolic capital as land owner. The lost of a man's role does not stop her to survive become a business woman to support her family through her ability. From this situation, it triggers her role as matriarchy and also patriarchal to maintain her household. In her mind set, Madam Lebrun choose to live with her children and not decide to marry again after being separated with her husband due to her business and tragic condition. The Council's finding married Creole women demonstrate, had some recourse if trapped in cruel and loveless marriage cases in eighteenth until nineteenth century (Morlas; 2005).

### **The independence life of Mademoiselle Reisz**

Mademoiselle Reisz is an independent woman who supports her life by spending the rest of her life to be a famous pianist. Here is the utterance of Mademoiselle Reisz towards people who likes her music in the stage.

*... "Well, how did you like my music?" she asked...  
"You are the only one worth playing for. Those others? Bah!" and she went shuffling and sidling on down the gallery toward her room. ( Chopin, IX ; 22 )*

From the utterance above, Mademoiselle Reisz reveals her happiness when there are people who appreciate to music. It can be seen in her response toward Edna that she is the only one who likes her piano playing. Mademoiselle Reisz is a humble woman, not mad in praise from others even though her name has been known by people as the musician.

*... She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others. Robert prevailed upon her without any too great difficulty. ( Chopin, IX ; 21 )*

From the utterance above, the short description of Mademoiselle Reisz is a woman who has the confidence and brave soul. "The statement of "*she was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one*" reveals that she would fight and struggle anything for getting the rights. It can be seen in her persistence to defend her desire as part of her trait.

From the description above, Mademoiselle loves to be an individual and music devotion as the part of her honor. It can be shown in her persistent to struggle her own right and appreciate to people who love her music.

Mademoiselle Reisz has strong trait that made her become dignified even though many people do not like her behavior. A class status distinction trigger her confidence for getting the equality.

*... In truth, he did not want to know her at all, or anything concerning her—the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street. He thanked heaven she had left the neighborhood, and was equally thankful that he did not know where she had gone. ( Chopin, XX ; 51 )*

From the statement of "Unpopular woman", it is revealed that the social status is more important. Mademoiselle lived beyond the neighbors who have the high social status. It seems that the social status is very important in the society. Mademoiselle Reisz is out of Creole community and move away to another place in which the freedom can be reached

without the social gap. It can be seen in her social environment that made her become egoistic woman.

In conclusion, the portrayal of Mademoiselle Reisz shows that she is a woman who has the confidence of being herself and music as part of her life. Hence, the condition of escape from her community triggers her strong temperament as her self-respect for getting right equality indiscriminately. She presents her skill as her cultural capital to be an authority source and it is reflected in her egoistic trait. The habitus of withdrawal from the society and her ability as the competent pianist who can play a piano create her mind set to have distinctive behavior. From Pierre Bourdieu's concept, it can be concluded that practice which is launched by Mademoiselle Reisz is influenced by her condition and cultural capital as her manifestation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The distinctive perceptions of four Creole women in *The Awakening* can be concluded is influenced based on their own social, economic and politic background. The existences of different women's role in *The Awakening* is reflected by genetic structuralism as worldview where the habitus as the mainstream influence to four Creole women's perspective. The social, politic and economic background as cultural change creates and influences the practice to get the opportunity.

This depiction of Creole women and their background are engaged to the society at that time. The Napoleonic Code which is used in French descendent does not seem help the women desire. From the Napoleonic Code, it can be seen that there is a striking comparison between men and women position. The law does not give the absolute right based on the women condition. The position of wife is like the slavery in which only their masters and the law can manage her life. For readers who interested to analyze Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* can explore more about intrinsic elements of the novel. The writer only explore the main characters. The writer suggests the whole intrinsic elements must be explore, thus we can get the shape of worldview analysis in detail.

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